

Promoting Collaborative Learning of Chinese Language and Culture Using Storify

Abstract: This paper discusses the design and assessment of the project, while examining the role storytelling on social media plays in the development of students' language proficiency and cultural understanding as well as critical thinking skills.

Keywords:

proficient at using social media sources such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr. As they eagerly shared their findings, they gradually became more confident

have been integrated into the Chinese language curriculum. This paper introduces a group storytelling project on Storify (www.storify.com) that was completed in a third-year Chinese course at Emory University. The paper explores the effectiveness of social media in the teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture.

It argues that this type of multimodal projects cultivates an active and collaborative learning environment and facilitates the development of learners' knowledge of Chinese language and culture.

1 What is Storify?

Storify is a free online storytelling tool. There are countless posts, tweets, videos, and images online, and keeping up with everything posted on social media is an unrealistic task. Storify allows internet users to sort and collect information into one place. On Storify, users can search multiple social media streams such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr,

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YouTube, and Instagram, and then create new stories by pulling together the public content found on any or all of them.

Storify has been widely used by journalists and educators of journalism. News outlets such as CNN, CBS, and NBC have used Storify to curate content from social media. Journalism educators have been using it to organize readings, create multimedia course content, and teach students how to curate social media. As Fincham puts it, "The tool, which lets users pull together content from various social networks to tell stories, is a one-stop Web publishing shop for even the most technophobic educator." (Paynter, org)

2 A Storytelling Project on Storify in an Advanced Chinese Course

2.1 Teaching and Learning Goals

CHN303 is the third (advanced) course in the heritage track of the Chinese program at Emory University. Students enrolled in this Chinese program finish their first language

competency (CL, 2009: 82) This course aims to further develop the total range of their linguistic and cultural competencies through reading and analyzing texts of different genres and styles.

Considering the learning goals of this course, I designed a mid-term group project in

which students used Storify to create stories on aspects of Chinese culture and society.

The project engaged students in active learning through a comprehensive range of learning activities, including reading, writing, and speaking, of authentic writings and presentations. The goals of the project were to promote sophisticated language production and enhance students' socio-cultural understanding.

2.2 Project Description and Requirements

Students worked in groups of three. Each group produced a story using six or a cultural words) as a title. Students presented their presentations. The students included The Battle of Red Cliff, Why Can Cao Lost: (赤壁之战, 曹操为何失败), Spring Festival, China's New Year (春节, 中国新年), Hong Kong Government Office, The 100 Immortals to Find a Husband for Her Daughter (寻找百位富翁为女儿寻找丈夫)

招亲), The Mid-Autumn Festival: History, Changes, and Future (中秋节的历史, 变化与未来)。A list of selected stories and URLs are in the Appendix.

- Phase One—Preparation. A training session on using Storify was conducted by an

news reports, YouTube videos, photos, Weibo posts, etc. At least 20 assets must be included. Among them there must be a minimum of three blog posts on Weibo, three tweets, three videos, three images, three news reports from China and three

was required to write least five paragraphs of transitional texts to tie the storyline together. Finally, a rubric to evaluate the stories to less than 500 characters

Phase Three—Presentation and reflection. Each group was given 15 minutes to present their story to the class. Each member of the group submitted a one-page personal reflection on this project including his/her participation within the group,

and how the project impacted his/her Chinese language learning. A rubric was used to

Week 1	Instructor preparing sample story on Storify, students receiving, training, signing up on Storify, forming groups, deciding titles
Week 2	Researching and gathering assets, organizing assets
Week 3	Writing narrative and essay, receiving feedback on writing
Week 4	Completing story on Storify, links emailed to course Blackboard
week 5	in-class presentation, personal reflection, survey

2.4 Assessment

The stories on Storify were selected based on the following criteria:

Categories	Details
30%	<p>Pronunciation and Speaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak clearly, loudly, in cohesive paragraphs • All students have important parts and are well prepared
Critique 30%	<p>Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues clearly stated • Focused and well supported
	<p>Grammar and vocabulary usage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use sentences that are at the level of your proficiency
Quality of story 20%	Editorial judgment and quality of assets (images, videos, music, sound, etc.)

2.5 Students' feedback

A survey was conducted online to gauge students' feedback on this project. 38 students took the survey. Results are summarized in Table 1.

		1	2	3	4	5	(Agree)
1	I was able to develop reading skills when browsing media resources.	7.9% (3)	10.5% (4)	28.9% (11)	42.1% (16)	10.5% (4)	81.5% (31/38)
2	I was able to develop cultural knowledge on the subject that I chose.	13.2% (5)	7.9% (3)	13.2% (5)	42.1% (16)	23.9% (9)	79.2% (30/38)
3	I was able to develop writing skills by writing the midterm narrative and critique.	7.9% (3)	10.5% (4)	15.8% (6)	47.4% (18)	18.4% (7)	81.6% (31/38)
	I was able to develop reading skills by						

(续表)

		Scale (1=strongly disagree; 3=agree; 5=strongly agree)					% of
5	I had to use critical thinking skills to complete this project.	2.6% (1)	13.2% (5)	15.8% (6)	47.4% (18)	21.1% (8)	81.3% (32/38)
6	Creating a Storify project was easy and intuitive.	10.5% (4)	18.4% (7)	21.1% (8)	36.8% (14)	13.2% (5)	71.1% (27/38)
7	I found this to be a suitable project to create.	5.3% (2)	18.4% (7)	18.4% (7)	36.8% (14)	21.1% (8)	79.9% (30/38)

Below quotes comments from students' reflection essays:

- "Through the process of doing this project, my personal Chinese speaking, reading and writing skills have greatly improved. Even the pronunciation of Chinese words to create the project. Because I did most of the proof reading and wrote the narration. So, both reading and writing aspects of my Chinese improved the most."
- "I think Storify is a useful tool for education—it simplified the storytelling activity while combining with technology. It is essentially the next generation of storytelling. I was very impressed with its function and could see myself using it in the future. Overall, I highly recommend Storify for students to use, as it is a powerful storytelling tool."
- "This project has definitely helped my learning of the Chinese language and culture ... Storify seems to be a very good tool. It is easy to use and helps to combine the two completely different sources into one place while having no skills or knowledge in Chinese and English. It is really helpful in learning Chinese and English courses."

3 Discussions

In the teaching of foreign languages, course contents are increasingly presented in multimodal, interactive, technology-mediated, e-learning format (Birch & Sankay, 2008). Literacy research continues to explore how multiple modalities influence the literacy development of our students. In the proposal for a blended learning model, Piccano points out that "multiple intelligences and mental abilities do not exist as yes-no entities but within a continua which the mind blends into the manner in which it responds to and learns from the external environment and instructional stimuli." Conceptually, this suggests a framework for a multimodal instructional design that relies on a variety of

pedagogical techniques, deliveries, and media.” (Piccano, 2009; 116) Mayer (2003) contends that students learn more deeply from a combination of modalities than from any single modality. This project was designed to engage students in active learning in multiple modalities. For each of the stories, students researched materials in texts, videos, images. They had to use linguistic, visual and audio modes to find information and analyze contents. Creating their own stories was a knowledge-building and knowledge-application process in which students explored the interconnectedness of multiple domains, exchanged information, and collaborated with their peers. In terms of language learning, the survey data, with over 80% agreement to statements 1, 3, 4 and 5, demonstrated that this type of multimodal learning was effective in developing students' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Additionally, since the topics of the stories were based on aspects of the Chinese culture and society, the project engaged students in active exploration of Chinese cultural topics. Nearly 80% of the students felt that this project helped them develop their cultural knowledge on the subject they chose. Below are some comments in their reflection essays:

- “We all worked together in collecting assets both from our personal experience at the University and also from online sources. Working with others, seeing examples also helped me understand how to write better. Reading their work as well as reading Chinese articles helped me with my reading abilities as well.”
- “The project has definitely helped my learning of the Chinese language and culture. While I was aware of the battle of the Red Cliff, my knowledge mostly stemmed from watching hours of popular films and putting together bits and pieces of Chinese history. Having had to do some research on and present our topic, I was able to walk away with a very clear understanding of what took place.

Having to sift through the Chinese sources forced me to sit down and read through some of the more difficult texts, which improved my Chinese reading and comprehension skills. With that, I was able to express myself better in writing. I

the students were able to explore a specific cultural or social issue and express their thoughts both orally and in writing, when they

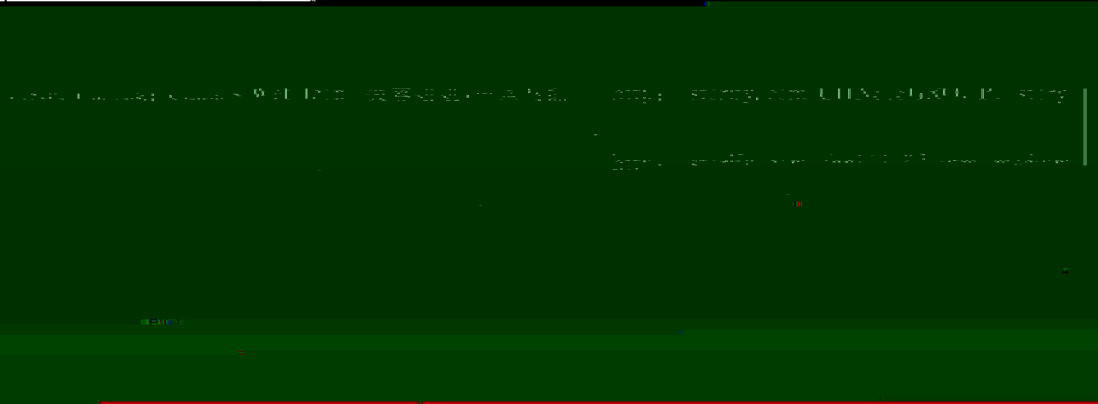
4 Concluding Remarks

This paper described a mid-term group project for an advanced Chinese class for heritage speakers at Emory University. While observing several areas for improvement, this project has a positive impact on student learning. Considering the learning goals for

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App: Storify

The Battle of Red Cliff: Why Cao Cao Lost (赤壁之战)	
	
(属于所有华人的节日——春节)	new-year